

Buddha in the Qur’ān?

by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf

When Buddhism and Islam are considered together, some see it as a matter of comparing apples and oranges. Upon deeper examination, there is—like the two savory grown-on-trees, seeds-in-the-flesh fruit—much which the two faiths have in common. Buddhism sees itself as a reformist movement that emerged from the preceding Hindu tradition. Similarly, Islam sees itself as a reformist movement, one that emerged from the preceding Abrahamic traditions and in response to perceived Jewish and Christian spiritual dissipation. Both Buddhism and Islam have universalist claims, with strong core doctrines, such as the five pillars and six articles of faith in Islam, and the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path in Buddhism. But perhaps most significant is that both are rooted in deeply rich ethical canons that consider kindness, compassion, and mercy as the core human qualities to be nurtured. In his talks throughout the world, the Dalai Lama emphasizes similar virtues, and the Qur’ān calls the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ “a mercy to all the worlds” (21:107).

While many similarities can be discerned, there is also a shared history that has been mutually beneficial for both traditions, especially for the Muslims, because it prompted them to discuss how to deal—theologically and legally—with religions they had newly encountered. When the early Muslim dynasties conquered lands in Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, not to mention the Indian subcontinent, they found large Buddhist populations, and they looked to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah¹ for guidance.

The Qur’ān discusses categories of belief in the surah² entitled, “The Pilgrimage,” which is one of the most important surahs dealing with other faiths and beliefs, and it contains several verses that

1. The Sunnah is the normative practice of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. For example, it was the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ to take an afternoon nap. The Arabic word *sunnah* is derived from a root meaning “way, practice.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “I have left for you two things: the Qur’ān and my Sunnah; if you cling to them, you will not go astray” (narrated by Imam Mālik in *al-Muwattā’*). The Sunnah is derived from the words, actions, and tacit approvals and disapprovals of the Prophet ﷺ. It is the second most important source of authority and legislation in Islam after the Qur’ān.

2. Surah refers to a chapter in the Qur’ān. The Arabic word *sūrah* is derived from a root meaning “wall, form,” as each surah’s function is to wall in and provide form to one section of the Qur’ān.

directly address religious diversity.³ The most definitive verse of this surah in this regard distinguishes between six categories of religious belief, and Muslim exegetes have traditionally placed all religions and sects into one of these six: “As for the Muslims, the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the polytheists, God will decide among them on the day of resurrection” (22:17). The weighty import of this verse is that it is theologically prohibited for us to condemn any individual, irrespective of his or her faith, to damnation or punishment in the afterlife because ultimate judgment belongs to God alone. Many hadith⁴ and statements of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ also affirm this fundamental article of faith.

So where did Muslims traditionally place the Buddhists among these six categories? Unlike many modern Muslims who consider Buddhists to be among the polytheists, believing them to be idolators due to the profusion of images and statues of the Buddha, early Muslim scholars of comparative religion had a very different view. They held a favorable opinion of Buddhists and marveled at the profound spirituality of Buddhist practitioners.

In classical Muslim literature on religions and sects, we find many references to “al-Badadah,” meaning the Buddhists, as well as to “al-Budd,” the Buddha himself. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 998), an Iraqi bookseller and author of the famous work entitled *The Compendium (al-Fihrist)*, who catalogued existing authors and their subjects of study, records books that deal with Buddhism, including *The Life of Buddha (Kitāb al-Budd)*. In his chapter entitled “Notes on the Buddha,” Ibn al-Nadīm delineates the different scholarly views of the Buddha: some believed he was the divine incarnate,⁵ while others

3. See the section entitled “Qur’ānic premises of dialogue,” pp. 12-14 in Reza Shah-Kazemi’s text for further discussion of this theme.

4. The hadith are statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by which his Sunnah is known. They constitute the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ as well as the sayings of his companions that narrate his actions or descriptions. The hadith are considered an authoritative source of legislation and constitute a major source of guidance for Muslims, second only to the Qur’ān. They were originally orally transmitted and passed down using a rigorous method of authentication and were compiled from the beginning of the latter part of the first century of the Islamic era into the fourth century.

5. While there are some Buddhists who see the Buddha as a divine being, which for Muslims would constitute clear idolatry (*shirk*), many Buddhists do not. Mu Soeng comments, “For the Sthaviras, the Buddha Shakyamuni was a historical personage—a great teacher but not a divinity.” While Mahayana expressions of devotion can be construed as idolatrous, Theravada Buddhism is less so, but Bud-

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claimed he was a messenger of God; still others thought Buddha to be a generic name for those who guided others onto the right path. He describes the extraordinary images of the Buddha in Bamiyan, (in what is today called Afghanistan), and writes that statues of the Buddha were brought from there to Baghdad. He also mentions the Nava Vihara monastery, the famous site of pilgrimage in the same region that was visited by Buddhists from far and wide, by land and by sea. He writes of the Golden Temple that he learned of from an Indian source he trusted, who said that pilgrims seeking cures found that upon seeing the temple, God healed their ailments.⁶

Perhaps the most significant classical Muslim description of Buddhism is found in Imam Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī's (d. 1153) comprehensive survey entitled, *Religions and Sects (al-Milal wa al-nihal)*. Imam al-Shahrastānī was a notable Shafi'ī jurist, Ash'arī theologian, and author of the most celebrated and cited work on comparative religion in the pre-modern Islamic tradition.⁷

In this work, he also makes a rather stunning—and intriguing—statement connecting the Buddha to a character in the Qur'ān.

Before we explore that assertion, it is worth noting that Imam al-Shahrastānī identifies the Buddhists as Sabians, which is a consequential categorization, given the status that Sabians have in the Qur'ān as a saved group. The root word of Sabians is *saba'*, which is “the rising of a star.” Most exegetes explain that the Sabians worshipped the stars because they believed the stars are vehicles by which God organizes the world. In several commentaries, the Sabians are also described as believing in reincarnation and the eternity

dhist priests have historically tolerated devotional expressions that often had their roots in previous idolatrous traditions of the peoples they encountered. Chā'n Buddhism rejects all forms of idolatry openly and in practice. See for further discussion Shah-Kazemi's text, section entitled “The Buddha as Messenger,” pp. 14-19, and “Images of the Buddha, Blessings upon the Prophet,” pp. 73-78.

6. Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d), 486-489.

7. Imam Abū al-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī was a student of the erudite polymath theologian, Imam al-Qushayrī. He was born in Shahrīstan, an area between Nishapur and Khawarizm, and both these areas had large Buddhist populations. He became a popular preacher in Baghdad, and Ibn Khalīkkan says about him, “He was an accomplished imam, jurist, and theologian, as well as a noted preacher. He is most famous for his book, *al-Milal wa al-nihal*, which attempts to give an account of all of the religions and sects known at that time.”

of the world. They are sometimes erroneously identified with the Mandaean Sabians of Lower Iraq who held some Zoroastrian beliefs regarding light and darkness.

Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1255) believed that the Sabians were of two types: polytheistic and unitarian. According to him, they were people who did not have a law taken from a prophet, but he argues that there are also people among Jews, Christians, and Magians who, despite not having a religion *per se*, know God as one and do not deny God. He said they cling to a shared type of submission (*islām mushatarak*) that entails “worshipping God only, being truthful and just, prohibiting indecent and foul things, and prohibiting oppression as well as those other matters prophets were in agreement on.” Furthermore, he affirms, “[They say,] ‘There is no deity but God’ despite having neither a revealed book nor a prophet.”⁸ He argues that the latter group refers to the Sabians included in the Qur’anic category of those who attain salvation. This is strengthened by the fact that the verse states that they believe in God and the Last Day. Furthermore, even if their beliefs are considered erroneous, this does not negate the possibility of their being saved on that day, according to the dominant theological position of the Ash‘arī schools, since idolaters who were not recipients of a revealed message are not held accountable for not knowing—and accepting—divine unity.

In addition, hadith literature clearly indicates that some people with false beliefs will be saved in the afterlife. For example, according to a sound hadith, a man had his sons cremate him, hoping that God would not be able to recreate him and then punish him in the afterlife. The Prophet ﷺ informs us that God forgave the man, even though he doubted God’s omnipotence, which is considered disbelief (*kufr*).⁹ The verse in the Qur’ān categorizing those who will be saved states, “Surely those who believe, and the Jews, Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, has their reward with their Lord and shall neither fear nor grieve” (2:62). Regarding this verse, Imam al-Alūsī (d. 1854), in his authoritative commentary, states:

The Sabians are a group whose different schools revolved around a fanatical adherence to spiritual teachers

8. *Al-Mawsū‘ah al-muyyassarah*, vol. 2, (Riyad, S.A., n.d.), 764.

9. For a more extensive examination of this problem, see my article, “Who are the Disbelievers?” *Seasons Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, (San Francisco: Zaytuna Institute, 2008), 31-50.

(*ruhāniyyīn*) and taking intercessors. When they were unable to draw near through them directly and to take from their essences, some of them resorted to using pagodas.¹⁰ So the Sabians of Asia Minor relied upon planets, and the Sabians of India relied upon stars, and some of them abandoned the temples and used images that can neither hear nor see or benefit anyone one iota. The first group consists of worshippers of planets and the second of idolaters. And each of the two groups [of Sabians] has many types and differs in their beliefs and rites. Imam Abū Hanīfah (d. 767) argues that they do not worship idols, but rather they exalt the stars, as the Kaaba, for example, is exalted [among Muslims].¹¹

The Imam acknowledges here that Sabians are of different types and that among them are those in India as well as other places whose belief in the planets is clearly negated in Islam. It is impossible to know with any certainty whether the Buddhists as well as the Hindus can be included in this category, and scholars do not seem to have ever claimed this. But given the ambiguous language referring to Sabians and Magians that is used in the surahs al-Baqarah, al-Mā'idah, and al-Hajj, Muslims are advised to say “God knows best” (*Allāhu 'alam*).

The Abrahamic faiths' belief in God and the Last Day is not understood in the same manner in either Buddhism or Hinduism but certainly has parallels in both their teachings, especially in Pure Land Buddhism and philosophical Hinduism, which acknowledges one God and recognizes that the images in the temples are only aids to help simple people grasp a particular aspect of the universal, transcendent nature of God. While idolatry is an unpardonable sin in Islam, it is clear from the first prohibition the Qur'ān mentions, “And do not set up rivals with God, *knowingly*” (2:22), that it is predicated upon wittingly worshiping anything beside God or giving it attributes of divinity. Ignorance, according to the dominant opinion among Muslim scholars, is excused if no clear message—of

10. The word in the original Arabic text is *hayākil*, which can be glossed as a “temple or large alter.” Al-Isfahānī says that it is “any large structure; a temple that Christians use that contains an image of Mary.” Hence, it is a temple with an image, which is essentially what a pagoda is, and Webster's dictionary defines pagoda as “a religious building of the Far East,” which is exactly what Imam al-Alūsī is referring to here. And God knows best.

11. See Imam al-Alūsī, *Ruh al-ma'ānī*, (2:62).

submission to God—has been given to a people. Imam al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) argues that this exception also applies to those who receive a distorted presentation of Islam and reject it.¹²

In addition to including Buddhists among the Sabians, Imam al-Shahrastānī makes another remarkable assertion in *Religions and Sects* about the identity of the Buddha and a Qur’anic character. In a section entitled, “The Buddhists,” he states:

[The Buddhists believe] Buddha is a person from this world who is born and does not marry, eat, drink, age, or die. The first Buddha to manifest in the world is known as Shakyamuni, which means “honorable and noble.” Between his appearance and the Hijrah is approximately 5000 years.¹³ The next category below this is the Boddhisatva, which means “a seeker of the truth.” One achieves this rank through patience and giving; and by desiring what should be desired; leaving attachment to this world; abandoning its appetites and pleasures; rising above its prohibited things; having mercy for all of creation; avoiding the ten sins: murder, theft, fornication, lying, dissention, foulness, cursing, name-calling, harshness, and denying the spiritual masters of the next life; and perfecting the ten virtues: generosity and charity, forgiving those who wrong you, overcoming anger with forbearance, relinquishing the pleasures of this world, meditating upon the eternal world and letting go of this ephemeral abode, exercising the intellect through study, comportment, and reflection upon the ends of matters, mastery of self-discipline by seeking the exalted, gentleness in word and deed toward everyone, conviviality with one’s fraternity and preferring others to oneself, and complete detachment from creation with total inner disposition toward the Truth,

12. See Abū Hāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Majmū‘at rasā’il al-Ghazzālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), 96.

13. The author is off by about four thousand years. While al-Shahrastānī’s account of Buddhism is somewhat flawed, it is remarkable for his time, and whatever errors it contains are no doubt a result of misinformation provided to him from his sources. While there is considerable debate on the exact date of the Buddha’s birth, it is generally given around 563 BCE in Nepal. His death date was around 480 BCE, which would mean he preceded the Prophet ﷺ by approximately a thousand years, with about a 50-year margin of error.

extending one's entirety in rapturous desire of the Truth, in order to arrive at the gardens of Truth.... Among their scholars, they do not differ as to the eternity of the cosmos and their belief in *karma*, as previously mentioned. They emerged in India due to the special qualities of that land and its topography as well as the fact that among its peoples are those who excel in spiritual exercises and self-mastery. Based upon their description of the Buddha, if they are accurate, it would seem that he is none other than al-Khadir, whom Muslims acknowledge, upon him be peace.¹⁴

This last suggestion that there is a relationship between al-Khadir ﷺ and Buddha is noteworthy, and the commonalities between the two are worth contemplating. Although al-Khadir ﷺ is associated with the period of Moses ﷺ in the Qur'ān, a widespread belief among Muslims is that al-Khadir ﷺ does not die until the end of time. Hence, al-Shahrastānī would not have been troubled by this historical discrepancy--between the recorded historical dates of Moses ﷺ and the Buddha is a distance of approximately 700 years--since he would have most likely held the belief that al-Khadir ﷺ was a trans-historical character. It is also possible to interpret the figure of al-Khadir ﷺ as a supra-historical archetype, or a particular mode of spiritual guidance—antinomian and enigmatic, radically transcending human modes of comprehension, and even “normal” modes of prophetic guidance. Thus, rather than simply seeking to establish a historical connection or identification between al-Khadir ﷺ and the Buddha, one might also see the Buddha as *one* manifestation of the spiritual archetype articulated by the Qur'anic figure al-Khadir ﷺ. This point of view is substantiated by the remarkable parallels one sees between the two figures.

Al-Khadir ﷺ is indeed an enigmatic character. According to the Qur'ān, he is given two gifts directly from God: mercy and experiential knowledge of reality. He is generally not considered a prophet. He is a teacher who wants no students, and, in the Qur'anic narrative, he attempts to dissuade Moses ﷺ from attempting to learn what cannot be taught but has to be experienced. This is a very Bud-

14. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa al-nihal* (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 710-712. Given al-Shahrastānī's stature and status as an authoritative imam and his knowledge of Buddhism and Islamic theology, it is singularly noteworthy that he should suggest the possibility of the Buddha being the Qur'anic sage, al-Khadir ﷺ.

dhist view. The Buddha is reported to have said, “If one would make oneself as one teaches others to be, one should master self-control, for the self is truly hard to tame.”¹⁵ Al-Khadir ﷺ uses a Zen-like approach, in which the student cannot discern the meaning of his actions but has to endure the teacher’s outward antinomian behavior patiently. He is described by most of the theologians of Islam as someone who was given direct knowledge (*‘ilm ladunniyy*), which is not revelation, but knowledge “from the divine presence.” It is defined as:

A direct knowledge someone obtains from God without means of an angel or a prophet through witnessing, as occurred with al-Khadir.... It is said that it is a knowledge of the divine essence and its qualities with a certainty that arises from direct witnessing and experience that occurs in the inner eye of consciousness.¹⁶

Sufi exegetes of the Qur’ān have argued:

Al-Khidr represents the inner dimension, esoterism, which transcends form. He appears to men in those moments when their own soul bears witness to an awareness of that dimension. In that rare case when there is a spontaneous realization of spiritual truth on the part of a *fard*, a “solitary” or someone who is by destiny cut off from revelation or from normal channels of spiritual instruction, it is al-Khidr who is the teacher, as in the saying “when the disciple is ready, the master appears.”¹⁷

The Sufi sage and recognized master Ibrāhīm b. Adham, who was a ruler of Balkh and abandoned his throne for a life of asceticism in the wilderness after al-Khadir ﷺ appeared to him twice, said, “In that wilderness I lived for four years. God gave me my eating without any toil of mine. Khidr the Green Ancient was my companion during that time—he taught me the Great Name of God.”¹⁸

15. Thomas Cleary, *Dhammapada: The Sayings of Buddha* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 54.

16. See Dr. Anwar Fu’ād Abī Khuzām, *Mustalahāt al-Sūfiyyah* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan, 1993), 128.

17. Cyril Glasse, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 258. “Al-Khidr” is a variant spelling of “al-Khadir.”

18. Ibid. Al-Khadir ﷺ is believed to be alive, and many Muslim saints throughout Islamic history have claimed to have met him and learned from him. There

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According to a sound hadith related by Imam al-Bukhārī, the Prophet ﷺ stated that al-Khadir ؑ was named so “because he sat upon white herbage under which green foliage sprouted forth.”¹⁹ This is an astonishing hadith, given that the Buddha is often depicted as sitting or walking upon large white lotus flowers with green foliage under them. The large white lotus flower also matches the Arabic description of *farwah baylā'*, a white “sheepskin-like plant”; given the Arabs had few names for flowers, the meaning is left to conjecture. It is also interesting that the color green is associated with both al-Khadir and the Buddha. “Al-Khadir” literally means “the Green Man,” while the Buddha’s lucky color is considered green, and he is often portrayed as green in statues.

Other remarkable similarities revolve around both lineage and location. A hadith mentioned by Ibn ‘Ajībah in his commentary on the Qur’ān says:

The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said concerning al-Khadir, “He was the son of a king who desired that his son inherit his throne, but he refused and fled to a secluded island place where they could not find him.”²⁰

This is no different from the story of Gautama Buddha, a prince who fled his palace and sought out a secluded place in which to meditate. In a similar vein, Ibn ‘Asākir also relates that al-Khadir ؑ was a king’s son who did not desire power or women, and he mentions that al-Khadir ؑ remained celibate throughout his life.²¹ Al-Alūsī, in his Qur’anic commentary, narrates that Abū Nu‘aym, in his *Hilyah*, mentions that al-Khadir ؑ was in India, as was the Buddha.

In addition, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) also relates two teachings of al-Khadir ؑ that are surprisingly Buddhist in their essence. The first is on the authority of Wahab b. Munabbih (d. 729) who relates that

are other scholars who deny this and use as proof the well-known statement of the Prophet ﷺ that “within one hundred years, everyone on earth alive today will be dead.” This hadith indicates, however, the meaning of *qarn* or “a generation,” and does not negate the possibility of someone existing outside a normal lifespan. And God knows best.

19. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, who relates the hadith said that “*al-farwat al-baydā'* which he sat upon was white herbage or its like, ... and others said it was a white plant that the Prophet ﷺ likened to white sheepskin.” See Ibn Kathīr, *Qasas al-anbiyā'*, (Beirut: Tihāmah li al-Nashr wa al-Maktabāt, 1997), 349-351.

20. See Ahmad ‘Ajībah, *al-Bahr al-madīd*, (18:65).

21. See Ibn Kathīr, *Qasas al-anbiyā'*, 454.

al-Khadir ﷺ said, “O Moses, people suffer in this world to the degree of their mental attachment to it.”²² According to the same book, when al-Khadir ﷺ departed from the company of Moses ﷺ, he left him with this advice: “Be beneficial wherever you go, and never cause any harm; be joyful and radiant, and do not become angry; leave disputation; never go anywhere without purpose; and never laugh without amazement.”²³

In the Qur’anic narrative, when al-Khadir ﷺ explains to Moses ﷺ the reasons why he committed the apparently inexplicable acts about which Moses ﷺ questions him, al-Khadir ﷺ gives as his reason, “It was all mercy from God that compelled me; I was not acting from my own concerns” (18:82). This exemplifies the Arahāt’s purpose in life. While discrepancy about the historical time period between that of Moses ﷺ and of the Buddha remains, the fact that Imam al-Shahrastānī could see the parallels between the teachings of the Buddha and of al-Khadir ﷺ stands as a powerful affirmation from a master Islamic theologian that, indeed, much of what we find in Buddhism is compatible with a Qur’anic worldview. One striking example is the Buddha’s statement, “One who knows self is dear will keep it well guarded; the wise one keeps a vigil a third of the night.”²⁴ Similarly, the Qur’ān states, “The Lord knows that you [Muhammad] keep vigil in the night, nigh two-thirds, or half the night, or a third” (73:20).

The history of Islam, not unlike the history of other religions, has its enlightened and its dark periods. In Islam’s shared history with Buddhism, we find spans of time when Buddhists lived in relative peace and security under Muslim rule, and in other times, we find Muslims oppressing Buddhists, forcing them to convert or sometimes even massacring them. In some cases, we also find evidence of the Buddhist oppression of Muslims.

So it is worth looking back, not only at how well—or badly—Muslims and Buddhists have co-existed, but also at what the religion of Islam says about the Buddhists and their place in a Muslim dominated society.

22. This so accurately describes the basis of all Buddhist teaching that I will convey it in Arabic for those who wish to see that the translation is accurate. *Yā Mūsā, inna al-nāsa mu’adhabūna fī al-dunyā ‘alā qadri humūmihim bihā*. See Ibn Kathīr, *Qasas al-anbiyā*, 352.

23. Ibid.

24. Cleary, 54.

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Buddhism was widespread in Central Asia, Iran, Tibet, the Indian subcontinent, and China long before the Muslims arrived and interacted with them in these places. As Islam spread into Southeast Asia, Muslims encountered Buddhists in Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Siam and also the Malay archipelago. Buddhism thrived during the early period of the Muslim conquests, and historical accounts describe in great detail the temples and Buddhist schools in places such as Balkh and Mazaar-e-Sharif in today's northern Afghanistan. Moreover, sound records note the travels of the Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar, Hsuan Tsang, visiting Balkh around the year 630 and finding about one hundred Theravedic Buddhist monasteries there. The keepers of one of the most important shrines in Buddhist history were Persian-speaking Afghans, known as the Barmakids, who were brilliant Buddhist administrators. After their conversion to Islam, they were brought to Baghdad during the rule of the Abbasid dynasty, where they revolutionized Muslim government and introduced important diplomatic innovations that changed the face of Islam.

In the eighth century, when Qutaybah b. Muslim led the Umayyad Caliphate army into Central Asia, he found many people he described as idol worshippers, most of whom were probably Buddhists, but there were also Manichaeans and Nestorian Christians in these lands. According to Arab historians, Qutaybah was warned by the native people that anyone who harmed the statues would perish. However, he began to wipe them out, and upon seeing that he did not suffer or perish as a result, many of the superstitious embraced Islam.

Dr. Alexander Berzin, historian and scholar of Buddhism, writes about the early expansion of Islam into central Asia:

[The Umayyad governors] allowed followers of non-Muslim religions in the lands they conquered to keep their faiths if they submitted peacefully and paid a poll tax.... Although some Buddhists in Bactria and even an abbot of Nava Vihara converted to Islam, most Buddhists in the region accepted this *dhimmi* status as loyal non-Muslim protected subjects within the Islamic states. Nava Vihara remained open and functioning. The Han Chinese pilgrim Yijing (I-Ching) visited Nava Vihara in the 680s and reported it flourishing as a Sarvastivada center of study.

An Umayyad Arab author, al-Kermani, wrote a detailed account of Nava Vihara at the beginning of the eighth century, preserved in the tenth century work *Book of Lands* (Arabic: *Kitab al-Buldan*) by al-Hamadani. He described it in terms readily understandable to Muslims by drawing the analogy with the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest site of Islam. He explained that the main temple had a stone cube in the center, draped with cloth, and that devotees circumambulated it and made prostration, as is the case with the Kaaba. The stone cube referred to the platform on which a stupa stood, as was the custom in Bactrian temples. The cloth that draped it was in accordance with the Iranian custom for showing veneration, applied equally to Buddha statues as well as to stupas. Al-Kermani's description indicates an open and respectful attitude by the Umayyad Arabs in trying to understand the non-Muslim religions, such as Buddhism, that they encountered in their newly conquered territories.²⁵

Nonetheless, opposition to Islam in these lands was violent, and non-Muslims were not allowed to carry weapons. Afghans maintain that Islam spread among them peacefully, but the historical record shows that Buddhism remained strong even after the Arab invasion up until the conversion of the king of Kabul during the reign of al-Ma'mūn (d. 833). A statue of the Buddha was sent to al-Ma'mūn as a tribute, and he had it shipped to Mecca where it remained on display for a few years, reminding all that the king of the Afghans had embraced Islam. This worked well as a bit of Abbasid propaganda in their efforts to spread Islam.

During the uprising of Imam al-Husayn in the Arabian peninsula, the Buddhists used the Umayyad neglect of Afghanistan as an opportunity to reclaim their sovereignty. In 705, the Tibetans allied with the Turki Shahis and attempted to drive the Umayyad forces from Bactria. In 708, the Buddhist prince, Nazaktar Khan, succeeded in removing the Umayyad forces and "established a fanatic Buddhist rule in Bactria. He even beheaded the former abbot of Nava Vihara who had converted to Islam."²⁶

Seven years later, the Arabs regained what was lost. The Mus-

25. Alexander Berzin, *Historical Sketch of Buddhism and Islam in Afghanistan*, 2006, (www.berzinarchives.com), 5.

26. Ibid.

lim general, Qutaybah, recaptured Bactria from the Turki Shahis and their Tibetan allies. Qutaybah imposed harsh punishment on the monastery, which led to many Buddhist monks fleeing to Khotan and Kashmir, thus strengthening Buddhism in these areas. The temple was restored, and the general policy towards the Buddhists was toleration, unless they were involved in any subversive opposition to Muslim rule.²⁷

The Tibetans, who had previously allied with the Turki Shahis, now allied with the Ummayyads and, in 717, sent an ambassador to the Ummayyad court of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Azīz, who in turn sent a Muslim scholar, al-Hanafī, to Tibet to preach Islam to the Tibetans. He seems to have been unsuccessful. Buddhism remained strong in Central Asia for over a hundred years of Muslim rule, which indicates a general toleration of the religion.²⁸ But by the mid-ninth century, Islam began taking hold among the Central Asians, despite widespread practice of Buddhism. Thomas W. Arnold, a British orientalist and professor of Islamic Studies, writes:

[The king of Kabul's] successors, however, seem to have relapsed to Buddhism, for when Ya'qūb b. Layth, the founder of the Saffārid dynasty, extended his conquests as far as Kābul in 871, he found the ruler of the land to be an "idolater," and Kābul now became really Muhammadan for the first time, the Afghans probably being quite willing to take service in the army of so redoubtable a conqueror as Ya'qūb b. Layth, but it was not until after the conquests of Sabaktigīn and Mahmūd of Ghazna that Islam became established throughout Afghanistan.²⁹

The polymath scholar, al-Bayrūnī, acclaimed as the founder of comparative religious studies, noted the decline and gradual disappearance of Buddhism in Afghanistan after the tenth century. He described what was left of Buddhism in Afghanistan during his time and engaged both Hindus and Buddhists during his sojourn in India when he accompanied the invading Muslim army of Mahmūd al-Ghazni. Evidence suggests that Muslim architecture that was used to build madrasas was influenced by the architecture of Buddhist

27. *Ibid.*, 4.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2002), 217.

monasteries.³⁰ It is clear that up until the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, Buddhism was still widespread in Eastern Muslim lands, and Buddhists could be found in Iran and Central Asia.

After the Mongolian invasion of these lands, Muslims suffered greatly and many of their subjects found an opportunity to exact revenge for previous Muslim transgressions. The level of animosity felt against the Muslims by some of their previous subjects is illustrated in the following incident from the reign of Kuyūk Khan (1246-1248), the grandson of Genghis Khan, as recounted by the Muslim historian al-Jūzjānī:

Trustworthy persons have related that Kuyūk was constantly being incited by the Buddhist priests to acts of oppression towards the [Muslims] and the persecution of the faithful. There was an Imām in that country, one of the men of learning among the Muslims ... named Nūr al-Dīn al-Khawārizmī. A number of Christian laymen and priests and a band of idol-worshipping Buddhist priests made a request to Kuyūk, asking him to summon that Imām of the [Muslims] that they might hold a controversy with him and get him to prove the superiority of the faith of Muhammad and his prophetic mission—otherwise, he should be put to death. The Khān agreed, the Imām was sent for, and a discussion ensued upon the claim of Muhammad to be a prophet and the manner of his life as compared with that of other prophets. At length, as the arguments of those accursed ones were weak and devoid of the force of truth, they withdrew their hand from contradiction and drew the mark of oppression and outrage on the pages of the business and asked Kuyūk Khān to tell the Imām to perform two genuflexions in prayer, according to the rites and ordinances of the [Muslim] law, in order that his unbecoming movements in the performance of this act of worship might become manifest to them and to the Khān.... When the godly Imām and the other [Muslim] who was with him had placed their foreheads on the ground in the act of prostration, some infidels whom Kuyūk had summoned, greatly annoyed them and knocked their heads with force upon the ground, and committed other abominable acts against them. But that godly Imām endured all this

30. Glasse, 302.

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oppression and annoyance and performed all the required forms and ceremonies of the prayer and in no way curtailed it. When he had repeated the salutation, he lifted up his face towards heaven and observed the form of “invoke your Lord with humility and in secret,” and having asked permission to depart, he returned unto his house.³¹

It is not surprising that Buddhists would have felt such hostility toward people that had so little regard for their faith and deemed them simply as “idolaters,” no different than those under whom Muslims had suffered in Mecca during the early years of Islam.

Nevertheless, not all Buddhists during this period were antagonistic to Islam, and some had a real interest in the tenets of the faith. Among the most prominent converts to Islam from Buddhism was Ghāzan Khan, the seventh and greatest Ilkhānid ruler of the Mongol Empire. He was born a Christian, raised a Buddhist as a young boy, and went on to erect several Buddhist temples in Khorasan. He ruled in Persia and brought with him into that country several Buddhist priests who were kept in his court and with whom he enjoyed conversing. At the height of his power, after a thorough study of Islam, he seems to have had a genuine conversion experience. His chronicler, the noted Muslim historian Rashīd al-Dīn, defended the conversion as sincere and argued, “What interested motive could have led so powerful a sovereign to change his faith: much less, a prince whose pagan ancestors had conquered the world?”³² Again, however, we find the Buddhists referred to as pagans.

There is no denying that we have this recurrent theme, both in the past and in the present, of Muslims labeling Buddhists as pagans, idolaters, or polytheists. This is somewhat compounded by the reality of the absolute disdain Muslims have for any forms of idolatry, even iconography. It is beyond the scope of this essay to adequately address the issue of whether Buddhism is an idolatrous form of worship. Suffice it to state that any such assertion would be a gross oversimplification, given the vast range of spiritual expression found under the umbrella of Buddhism. There are today Christian Buddhists, Jewish Buddhists, and Humanistic Buddhists, not to mention the variations found in history. The Bon influenced expressions of Cen-

31. Arnold, 225-226.

32. *Ibid.*, 233.

tral Asia, for instance, are quite different from the Cha'n Buddhism of China or its Japanese expression in Zen. And Zen Buddhism certainly cannot be termed idolatrous, even by Islam's severe standards of idolatry.

Complicating matters for Muslim-Buddhist relations is the reality that many Muslims tend to conflate veneration with worship.³³ Despite Abū Hanīfah's acknowledgement that Sabians did not worship the stars but merely venerated them in the manner of Muslims venerating the Kaaba, Buddhist ritual and the widespread use of Buddha's image in their devotional practices continues to fuel the narrative of idol-worship, especially among those Muslims who bring a fundamentalist approach to their faith.

Furthermore, we must also acknowledge that most forms of Buddhism are described by Buddhists themselves as either agnostic or atheistic, which eliminates the problem of idolatry, but creates just as severe a problem for Muslims because it also eliminates the idea of God altogether. In this regard we should take particular note of one of the central contentions of Dr. Shah-Kazemi in this book: that those Buddhists who describe themselves as atheist are in fact going beyond anything the Buddha stated. For, as Shah-Kazemi notes, on p. 31 of this book: "Nobody can deny that the Buddha's doctrine is non-theistic: there is no Personal divinity playing the role of Creator, Revealer, Judge in Buddhism. But to assert that the Buddha's doctrine is 'atheistic' would be to attribute to him an explicit denial and negation of the Absolute—which one does not find anywhere in his teachings." In other words, Buddhists do have a concept of ultimate reality, which although not Abrahamic or personal, does correspond to God in a transpersonal sense. In the same vein, not unlike Islam, certain strains of Buddhism include belief in an afterlife, a form of heaven and hell, and places of joy and suffering. These are themes raised and discussed in this book in a manner which we hope will lead to fruitful dialogue between Muslims and Buddhists, rendering clearer both where we differ and where our "common ground" lies.

The fact that Muslims historically relegated Buddhism to idolatry is more a reflection of an ignorance of the depth of Buddhist teaching and less a reflection of an Islamic understanding of Buddhism. In many ways, Islam is a bridge between Asian truths found in the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Vedantic

33. See in this connection the arguments of Shah-Kazemi upholding the non-idolatrous nature of Buddhist worship, pp. 58-78.

Hinduism and the truths found in the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism and Christianity.

Moreover, as has been clearly stated by Professor Kamali in his Foreword, and amplified by Dr. Shah-Kazemi, there were periods when Buddhists lived in safety under Muslim rule, paying a tribute (*jizyah*)³⁴ and were considered people of protected status (*dhimmah*), in accordance with the position of Imam Mālik (d. 795) and many Hanafī scholars, who permit protected status for non-Abrahamic religions, even ones which involve idolatry. Dr. Sādiq al-Ghiryānī explains this position:

Jizyah is taken from the Arab idolaters and whoever practices a religion other than Islam among Christians, Jews, Magians, Communists, Hindus, and any others among worshipers of idols or fire given that the Prophet ﷺ himself commanded those going out in military expeditions to oppose enemies of Islam to first call them to Islam and “should they refuse then invite them to pay tribute,” and he did not distinguish between a polytheist or the People of the Book, ... and in the sound hadith recorded in Muslim on the authority of ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf ؓ, the Prophet ﷺ took *jizyah* from the Magians of Hajar and Oman. Furthermore, on the authority of al-Zuhrī, Mālik states that the Prophet ﷺ took *jizyah* from the Magians of Bahrain, and ‘Umar ؓ accepted it from the Persians [and among them were Buddhists as well as the majority who were Zoroastrians], and ‘Uthmān ؓ accepted it from the Persians, and the Prophet ﷺ stated, “Treat them as you would the People of the Book.”³⁵

34. Though the word “tribute” is often viewed as unfavorable today, Webster’s dictionary defines it as “a payment by one ruler or nation to another in acknowledgment of submission or as the price of protection.” The *jizyah* is a formal tax paid by individuals living in a community under Muslim rule. Monastic orders are exempt from the tax, as are retired, disabled, and indigent people.

35. See Dr. Sādiq al-Ghiryānī, *al-Mudawwanah al-jadīdah* (Beirut: Mu’assasaat al-Rayyān, 2002), vol. 2, 454-59. He includes humanists and communists, which is consistent with Mālik’s position but unfortunately is not known by many Muslims who mistakenly believe that this option was traditionally available only to Jews and Christians. However, this would not explain the status of Hindus in India under Muslim rule for the past several hundred years, despite unfortunate and un-Islamic periods of persecution.

Once people have entered into a protected status, irrespective of their religion, they are allowed to travel freely in the lands of Muslims; there is only one sacred area in the Arabian Peninsula that is exempted, as the Prophet ﷺ reserved it only for Muslims and asked his followers to relocate from that area those people who were practicing other religions, which included Jews, Christians, and polytheists. The mere fact that he mentioned the polytheists in this hadith is a clear indication that non-Muslims are not to be forced into conversion or killed if they refused conversion. A small minority of Muslim scholars, however, takes an extreme position, citing the Qur'anic verse which states that Muslims should seek out and kill those polytheists who violated their treaty with the Muslims by treacherously killing unarmed Muslims (9:5). Yet the verse immediately following that states, "But should they appeal to you for security, then grant them such in order for them to hear the word of God. And thereafter, escort them to a place where they can be secure. That is because they are people without knowledge" (9:6).

Even though Buddhists and Hindus were oppressed at times under Muslims, more often than not they were protected, as were their places of worship. Some also achieved positions of high rank in Muslim society. These were the times when Muslims were practicing the best of their tradition. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Whoever oppresses a non-Muslim who has a covenant with Muslims, or who even belittles him or forces him to do something he is unable to do, or who takes from him anything that he is not satisfied in giving, I will argue against the Muslim on the Day of Judgment [on behalf of the non-Muslim.]"³⁶

The age of tribute and protected status (*dhimmah*) of others under Muslim rule is long gone and only remains as a historical curiosity, notwithstanding its valid legal status as part of the shariah. The Prophet ﷺ predicted that the first aspect of the faith to be removed from the world would be governance. And once removed, he stated that it would remain so until the return of Jesus ﷺ, who would personally remove the tribute payment from the shariah. What matters today is that we build upon the positive precedents established by our tradition of tolerant jurisprudence, and encourage Muslims to consider Buddhists as being akin to "People of the Book." This is one of the main aims of the present initiative to seek *Common Ground* between Islam and Buddhism. There is an Islamic legal precedent

36. This is a sound hadith in Abū Dāwūd's collection, no. 2626.

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for this in the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ in which we are told to treat the Magians as if they were People of the Book, with the exception of marrying their women and eating their meat.

Today, we live together in an increasingly interdependent world. The challenges facing us as a species behoove us to focus on our commonalities and our shared values. We are confronted with global crises of all types: environmental, economic, social, religious, and military, not to mention the tremendous natural disasters that are afflicting us on an increasingly frequent basis. Never before has human cooperation been needed so desperately, and never before has it been so imperative that we set aside our differences. Buddhism and Islam share profound precepts of charity, patience, forbearance, and a recognition that everything in the world is imbued with the sacred. We may speak of the sacred in different ways, using different words, but its essence is one. Buddhism teaches kindness, and Islam's essence is mercy, which is another word for kindness.

We often forget that kindness is engendered by a shared sense of "kind." "He is my kind of man," we say. When commonalities are accentuated and kindness is highlighted, we tend to treat others as our own kind, as related, as our "kin," a word that shares the same root with *gyn*, which means "womb" and is called *rahim* in Arabic, which relates to the word *rahmah*, meaning "mercy." The Qur'ān affirms all of humanity as being of one family: *Banu Adam*, humankind. When our common humanity and our kindred nature are brought to the forefront, kindness becomes not only possible but *natural*. Our earliest ancestors had valid reasons to fear strangers, but they also developed many traditions of honoring the familiar guest as well as the stranger. In the modern world, there is much to cause fear as well, but we must foster empathy, and cultivate and enhance our own ways of honoring the familiar guest and the stranger. While much evidence abounds to cause trepidation about succeeding at that task, I would argue that far more exists to inspire hope.

For the first time in human history, we have media at our fingertips enabling us to leap over vast stretches of land and sea instantaneously and communicate with people across the globe. From the comfort of our living rooms, we have the ability to see and understand how people of a different culture, ethnicity, or religion live their lives, and we are able to marvel at the richness and biodiversity

of our planet. We delight in the diversity we find in nature; we are awed by the myriad varieties of flora and fauna; and we express our love with bouquets of varied and colorful flowers. Even the most curious strangers from distant lands are increasingly part of our collective consciousness.

Yet fear too often wells up when we are confronted with people who do not seem like us. We fall back on xenophobia, which literally means “a fear of the other.” Oddly, it is often religion that causes divisiveness and dread when it ought to unite believers and inculcate in them the Golden Rule, which is a universal principle—thus at once sacred *and* secular—articulated by the Abrahamic prophets as well as the Asian sages from the Buddha to Confucius. Far too often, a distorted understanding of our faith traditions causes us to demonize the other as infidel or idolater, tyrant or terrorist, and as somehow less than human. While Buddhism seems to have less of this tendency than other faiths, it is not—and historically has not been—immune to these problems. Islam, which historically was more often than not a fount of tolerance in a xenophobic world, is now seen by some as being infected with intolerance. Sadly, some Buddhists are among those who have suffered at the hands of small numbers of misguided Muslims who attacked them and the temples of those they deemed to be “not of our kind.”

Yet, if we look around the world today, there is much that we find heartening. Muslims live as minorities in Buddhist countries, such as Thailand and Tibet, and share neighborhoods in California with Buddhists. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Gentleness is never in a thing except that it embellishes it and is never removed from something except that it blemishes it.”³⁷ Nothing in the Prophet’s teaching allows mistreatment of others based upon their beliefs. Islam itself began under intense religious persecution, and the Prophet ﷺ was deeply sensitive to this fact and left teachings to ensure that Muslims did not fall victim to the very behaviors that victimized them.

While Buddhists also have their own history of violence,³⁸ today they are some of the gentlest and most peaceful people on earth.

37. Sahih Muslim.

38. For a study in Japanese Buddhist use of violence see Mikael S. Adolphson’s *The Teeth and Claws of the Buddha: Monastic Warriors and Sohei in Japanese History*. For an extraordinary study on religious violence during the last two thousand years, see Naveed S. Sheikh’s *Body Count: A Quantitative Review of Political Violence Across World Civilizations*.

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Their leaders often preach kindness and compassion throughout the world, and the Dalai Lama has publicly defended Muslims and their faith—at the Vatican and in other prominent venues—despite having been mistreated in his youth by some ignorant Tibetan Muslims.

It is time we recognize that many of the gravest and most vexing conflicts today are fueled by religious rhetoric that cloaks deeper causes, mostly greed, covetousness, and aggression, which are rooted in selfish and territorial interests. But it is true religion that can treat and remedy these very human ailments. Religion gets conscripted into such degrading battles by demagogues, and that in turn tragically alienates an increasingly large number of considerate and concerned people who begin to see religion as part of the problem. Until we address the very real calamities confronting our collective humanity with all the tools available to us—especially religion and a genuine concern for humanity and the myriad species that we share this marvelous world with—we are failing our faiths. It is undeniable that we come from different faiths and families, but we must also recognize that we are quintessentially of the larger human family.

It is our common humanity that binds us to one another and calls us to recognize all people as our kind. “We have dignified all of humankind,” states the Qur’ān (17:70), while Buddhism reminds us that human suffering is caused by craving and selfish desire that must be countered by recognizing the impermanence of life and by inculcating compassion toward all sentient beings for the brief time we are here. Until we acknowledge our human nature, both the bestial and celestial sides, we are doomed to fail.

My own teacher, Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, once explained to me: “The dignity of humanity precedes the dignity of faith and is subordinate to it.” In other words, a human is inviolable by virtue of his or her humanity, even before the inviolability of shared faith. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stated, “None of you truly believes until he loves for his fellow man what he loves for himself.”³⁹ The great imams of Islam have argued that this mutual love and respect extends even to those who reject Islam, but can only be achieved by opposing one’s selfish desires. Similarly, the Bodhisattva is devoted to the cause of releasing all of humanity from the chains of false desire.

Islam and Buddhism share so many virtuous qualities and concerns for humankind that when Muslims or Buddhists are unkind to

39. Imam al-Nawawī’s Forty Hadith Collection, no. 13.

one another, it is no less than a failure of our leaders and teachers to help us understand our own traditions and our shared history. Increasing globalization demands that we affirm and accentuate the common bonds of universal kinship. If our faiths cannot facilitate this most important of tasks, then the professors, spiritual leaders, and claimants of such traditions have betrayed them by failing to live up to the sublime standards set by their respective prophets and founders.

In the best of times, Muslims have lived peacefully in many places with their Buddhist brethren. Buddhists lived under Muslim governance as protected people, and there is ample historical evidence to substantiate this. Their persons, properties, and temples were secure based upon the Qur'anic injunction, "God does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you" (60:8). The Qur'anic worldview is a pluralistic one that acknowledges the right of peoples to express their devotion in accordance with the dictates of their religion. It is clear that diversity is an expression of the divine itself, as the Qur'ān states, "Had God wanted, He would have made you all one people, but the intent is to test you, so vie with another in performing good works" (5:48).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said about protected religious minorities living under Muslim rule, "Whoever hurts a non-Muslim citizen hurts me, and whoever hurts me has vexed God."⁴⁰ The great Hanafī jurist, Ibn 'Ābidīn (d. 1836), argued that since Muslims are responsible for protecting the life and property of non-Muslims, including the Buddhists, and since the persecution of the weak at the hands of the strong is among the greatest crimes in Islam, the persecution of non-Muslims, including the Buddhists, in an Islamic state is considered a greater crime than the persecution of Muslims by non-Muslims.⁴¹

Despite the Islamic jurists' recognition of Buddhism as being classified among the protected religions, some Muslims have difficulty accepting Buddhists and those of other Asian traditions as possibly being considered among the Sabians mentioned in the Qur'ān, and other Muslims simply consider the Buddhists idolatrous, given

40. Imam al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunnan al-kubrā*, vol 5, 205. Narrated by al-Khatīb with an authentic chain.

41. 'Abd ar-Rahmān I. Doi, *Sharī'ah: Islamic Law*, revised and expanded by 'Abdassamad Clarke, (UK: Taha Publishers Ltd, 2008), 654.

their veneration of the images of the Buddha and its association with idolatry. For all such Muslims today, I would like to narrate a story from the Islamic tradition, once related by the sages of Islam to teach how to treat others, no matter what their beliefs are. Imam Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī al-Shingittī relates in his book *Fath al-Wadūd* the following:

It is related that an idolater once sought refuge with Abraham ﷺ and asked for nourishment. Upon seeing an idolater, Abraham ﷺ refused him and sent him off. Angel Gabriel ﷺ appeared and said to Abraham ﷺ, “I bring the greeting of peace from your Lord, who asks you, ‘Why did you turn away My servant?’”

Abraham ﷺ replies, “Because he was an idolater.”

“God asks you, ‘Did you create him or did I?’”

Abraham ﷺ replies, “Of course, You created him.”

“God asks you, ‘Was his disbelief in Me or in you?’”

Abraham ﷺ responds, “His disbelief was in You.”

“God asks you, ‘Were you providing for him all these years or was I?’”

Abraham ﷺ replies, “Indeed, You are my provider as well as his.”

“God asks, ‘Did He create that disbelief in his heart, or did you create it and nurture it in him?’”

Abraham ﷺ says, “No, You did.”

“God asks you whether his disbelief harmed him or you?”

Abraham ﷺ replies, “No, it harmed him.”

“God says, ‘If that is the case, then why did you deprive My servant and your brother? For he is in one of two possible conditions: fuel for the fire and an object of My wrath, or I can forgive him and make him among my beloveds and grant him peace in the abode of My mercy.’”

At this point, Abraham ﷺ went out in search of the man and found he was now fearful of him. He showed the man kindness and cajoled him into returning to his tent to feed him. The man said, “Something happened, as you are acting so differently towards me. Initially you refused me, and now you are showing me kindness, as if you want something from me.”

Abraham ﷺ said to him, “My Lord reproached me for the way I treated you.”

To this the man said, “What a blessed Lord you have that He should reproach His beloved due to his bad behavior toward His enemy.” He then submitted to the God of Abraham ﷺ and worshipped with him until he died.⁴²

This story—not necessarily its ending—illustrates the essential aim of both the *A Common Word* initiative and the present *Common Ground* project: inviting into our tent the stranger who may not look, worship, or be like us in many ways, *because* he or she is a creation of God, here for a purpose, and someone to be honored as a fellow guest of God. We are committed to setting an example and embodying in our attitudes, declarations, and behaviors the very change we wish to see manifest in the world. The challenge before us is to understand our teachings better—from within and without—so we can engender a true celebration of humankind’s diversity. For indeed, too many of us seem to have just enough faith to foment hatred, oppression, and fear among people, but not nearly enough to nurture kindness, compassion, and mercy.

42. Imam Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kunī al-Shingittī, *Fath al-Wadūd* (Damascus: Matba‘at al-Kitāb al-‘Arabiyy, 1991), 325.